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The Social Life Of the Caftan in Eighteenth-Century Russia

ABSTRACT

This article explores the 'cultural biography' of the caftan, a garment, which underwent significant changes as a part of Peter I's urban clothing revolution. The article discusses the evolution of the caftan and changes in its functions and meanings, its historical, social and literary modes of circulation, and the semiotic value it acquired in the eighteenth-century clothing system, and more broadly, in eighteenth-century Russian culture. As a key garment of the Petrine dress reforms, the caftan became a material symbol of eighteenth-century modernizing processes, and was often employed by writers to comment on social and cultural policies and practices. When the caftan (as part of a uniform) started to be associated with state control, and the infringement on individual freedom, this garment was replaced by the dressing gown, which became a symbol of internal peace, freedom and creativity in literature and cultural life.

KEYWORDS

eighteenth-century Russian culture, dress regulations, meanings and functions of caftans, caftans in folklore and literature

'The caftan, my friend, is sewn quite well'.

(Fonvizin, *The Minor*)

Denis Fonvizin's play *The Minor* (1782) opens with a famous scene, in which the caftan recently sewn for the protagonist Mitrofan becomes the discussion topic for members of the Prostakov family. This conversation provides an entry into the landowners' world and communicates their established hierarchies and personal relationships, as well as the tensions and anxieties within the household. Fonvizin was one among a number of eighteenth-century writers who employed the caftan to comment on cultural and social issues. The caftan was a subject of discussions in a number of literary texts from Antioch Kantemir's satires, journals of 1769-1774, and Nikolai Strakhov's works to Ivan Krylov's plays, and eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century memoirs. Such attention to this garment was provoked by the fact that, as an item of official dress, the caftan was altered several times following the dress reforms initiated by Peter I in 1700.

This article aims to explore 'the cultural biography' of the caftan, examining the evolution and changes in its functions and meanings in eighteenth-century Russia, its historical, social and literary modes of circulation, and the social and semiotic value it acquired in the eighteenth-century clothing system, and more broadly, in eighteenth-century Russian culture. Igor Kopytoff uses the concept of the cultural biography with reference to the economic circulation of commodities in the context of production, distribution, and consumption (2007: 14-15, 17, 64-68). I will employ this term in a broader cultural sense, focusing on the social and literary circulation of this particular garment, and changes in its meanings in legal and literary discourses on social practices and identity.

TYPES AND FUNCTIONS OF CAFTANS

The word 'caftan' is of Persian origin and came to Russia via Turkic languages. One of the first references to the garment is registered in Afanasii Nikitin's *The Voyage Beyond Three Seas*, a fifteenth-century text (Vasmer 1964-1973: 212, Vol. 2). As an item of clothing, a caftan had a fairly generic form in the seventeenth- and early eighteenth-centuries – it was a long, single- or double-breasted robe with long or short sleeves. The garment usually reached the ankles or covered the knees.[1] Representatives of all social estates, from serfs to members of the royal family, wore different forms of this garment. Depending on the wearer's economic status, a caftan could have been made of velvet, brocade, satin, taffeta, damask, cotton, flax or wool cloth of varying quality, with or without fur or fabric lining, and decorated with braids and buttons made of brass or precious stones.

Various types of caftans existed in pre-Petrine Russia. Caftans were defined according to their ethnic origins and functions, and the cuts and materials used for their production. Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century dress regulations mentioned Russian, Circassian and 'outlandish'/ European caftans (*The Complete Collection of Laws of the Russian Empire* (PSZRI) 1830: 1007-1008, Vol. 1; 182, Vol. 4). Some subjects wore Hungarian and Polish caftans, which were usually decorated with braids. However, before Peter I's reign (1682-1725), subjects were discouraged from donning Western European garments. As a result, the habit of wearing Western dress was not widespread in Russia.

From early in their cultural biography, particular types of caftans served distinct functions and were associated with certain social rituals, spaces and timeframes. Various types of caftans with and without linings were intended for different seasons and were worn both as under- and over-garments. Certain types of caftans were better suited for work, while others were designated for outings, repasts, morning rituals (a *spal'noi* caftan or

schlafrock, for instance), and for riding (a caftan called *chuga* with short sleeves and side slits). Black 'smirnye' [peaceful] caftans were worn during mourning rituals (Andreevskii, Arsen'ev, Petrushevskii 1890-1907: 802, Vol. 14; Kirsanova 1989: 109). Writing to his sister from St. Petersburg in 1766, Denis Fonvizin mentioned that since his arrival in the capital, he could only wear a black caftan. The court mourned deceased members of European royal families, and no coloured caftans were permitted in the city (1959: 340).

The caftan was an indispensable part of both urban and rural cultures, although after Petrine dress reforms, the styles worn in the two spaces differed significantly. Peasants wore fairly long caftans often made of undyed coarse homespun cloth while representatives of more privileged social estates, particularly in urban areas, wore modern dyed caftans made from more expensive fabrics, which usually reached just below the knee. According to the eighteenth-century writer Aleksandr Radishchev, in rural areas tailors or caftan makers, as they were often referred to, were mainly engaged in sewing peasant caftans and fur coats (1938-54: 185, Vol. 2). Undyed caftans and beards placed certain social and spatial limitations on their wearers. For instance, subjects wearing them were not allowed to attend celebratory assemblies in the Summer Garden in St. Petersburg (Bogdanov [1751] 1997: 139). These westernized public entertainments, which Peter I introduced in 1718, were occasions for socialization for both male and female members of upper classes.

CAFTANS IN FOLKLORE

Russian proverbs, songs, and fairy-tales contained ample references to caftans, communicating their social and cultural values. The caftan was a vital possession for the poor, and an important item of conspicuous consumption for the rich. In folklore, the caftan communicated real, desirable or lost social values, often mis/represented its owner's

economic and social status, and played an important role in challenging social assumptions, particularly in regard to the poor. As dyed fabric was expensive, coloured caftans were perceived as a sign of prosperity in the folk imagination. The fairy-tale about Emelian the Fool recorded in the eighteenth century portrayed the character coveting a red caftan, hat and boots promised to him by his brothers. The proverb '*Пуст карман, да синь кафтан*' (lit.: Although there is no money in his pocket, his caftan is blue) reflected the value placed upon dyed garments.[2] Both dyed caftans and lined caftans '*у него кафтан с подкладкой*' were indicative of a person's relative prosperity.

A number of proverbs identified the underprivileged through this garment and talked about their needs and qualities – '*В драке богатый лицо бережет, убогий - кафтан*' (lit.: In a fistfight, a rich man protects his face, a poor one – his caftan), '*Хоть кафтан и сер, а ум не черт съел'* (Although his caftan is grey, he is far from being a fool), and '*Рад Епифан, что нажил серый кафтан*' (lit.: Epifan is happy that he earned a grey caftan). In its origin, this last proverb has the implication of the economic poverty signified by the grey colour, although it conveys an ironic attitude. Folk expressions such as these indicate that the caftan offered social commentary (usually sympathetic to the poor) on class dynamics within Russian society.

RE-TAILORING THE CAFTAN IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DRESS REGULATIONS

The caftan had important cultural significance and utility in Russian culture – it was worn by all social estates, was practical, and durable, and projected values of trust, support and loyalty. However, in the course of eighteenth-century dress reforms, this garment gradually received a new European form and identity, and consequently started to be perceived as one

of the embodiments of the policies aimed at modernization of the country. Starting with Peter's reign, subjects of the Russian empire, with the exception of peasants and clergy, were required to wear European clothes instead of traditional Russian garments in urban spaces. The first dress regulation issued on 4 January, 1700 introduced "Hungarian' caftans, long on the outside to the garter and shorter, similar ones underneath [...]' for townspeople (*PSZRI* 1830: 1, Vol. 4). The decree offered a compromise between old and new styles, as Hungarian caftans were worn in pre-Petrine Russia, and their style resembled that of Russian caftans. The use of domestic vocabulary to describe this new dress aimed to help the population to better understand the dress changes.

Over time, the style of the caftan became increasingly more European. In December of 1701, when German/ Saxon and French dress styles replaced Russian and Circassian ones, the Russian word 'dress' [*plat'e*] and the borrowed word 'camisole' [*kamzol*] described men's dress. In 1702, the French caftan became a part of ceremonial dress, and seasonal regulations were introduced for lighter French and warmer Saxon caftans in 1704. The words 'dress' and 'caftan' were employed interchangeably in these decrees, while the undergarment was consistently referred to as a camisole (*PSZRI*, 1830: 1, 182, 189, 272-73, Vol. 4). Several of Peter I's caftans, sewn according to the new regulations, are preserved in the collection of his wardrobe at the State Hermitage Museum (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Caftan of Peter I (1700-1725): broadcloth, silk and galloon; length 122 cm.
Inv. No. ERT-8394
Courtesy of the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg
Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum.
Photo by Vladimir Terebenin, Leonard Kheifets, Yuri Molodkovets

While newly introduced garments were defined in terms of their ethnic origins in the legal documents, in reality, their cultural differences were not easily discernible by those who visited Russia at the beginning of the century. They often imposed various European identities onto the new garments, for instance, naming them English or Polish (Perry 1716: 197-200; de Bruyn 1737: 46, Vol. 1). As Aileen Ribeiro has shown, when the fashion for coats/caftans, waistcoats and breeches spread across Europe, regional differences in their design became less pronounced (c2002: 16-22).

Peter's successors continued to put his dress regulations into practice, also introducing them in rural areas.[3] The decree of 31 May, 1726 issued by Catherine I ordered all former military personnel to wear German clothes in both urban and rural areas, but permitted them to make these garments from homespun cloth, and dye the cuffs, if they could not afford foreign cloth (*PSZRI*, 1830: 654, Vol. 7). The decree was issued in response to the reports about retired military subjects wearing traditional Russian dress and beards. Both Russian dress and beards were seen as a potential form of dissent when worn by this social group because of the history of revolts of *strel'tsy* regiments against Peter I. Such decrees enforcing dress regulations were issued repeatedly throughout the century, revealing a clothing-based social control mechanism during the times of political and social instability (*PSZRI* 1830: 792, Vol. 11; 983, Vol. 16; 651, Vol. 17; 727, Vol. 24).

None of these dress regulations, however, concerned peasants in rural areas (unless they were former recruits), and thus, they continued to wear traditional Russian caftans. As a result of the dress reforms, the social, geographical (urban-rural) and ideological divide in society became more pronounced and semiotically charged through the opposition between officially promoted European clothes and traditional Russian dress, which was considered backward in this new context. As Western-style dress became more widespread, traditional garments were sometimes perceived as a cultural aberration rather than the norm even in rural areas. Andrei Bolotov, a well-known agriculturalist and memoirist, observed that village visitors who came to their estate in the Tula region resembled clowns dressed in long caftans with huge cuffs ([1789-1816] 1993: 138, Vol. 1). Similar descriptions of old-fashioned garments as odd can be found in Nikolai Strakhov's satirical fictional correspondence between *la Mode* and fashionable and old-fashioned objects (1791).

One of the aims of eighteenth-century dress regulations was to integrate subjects into institutional structures within the empire. Within this process, certain styles and colours of caftans started to be associated with particular occupations and regions, for instance, members of Peter's elite Preobrazenskii and Semenovskii Guards Regiments wore caftans of green and azure colours respectively. During the reign of Catherine II, occupational uniforms were introduced, for instance, for officers of the Communication and Transportation Chancellery who were in charge of postal stations. From 31 August, 1765, they were required to wear uniforms consisting of blue cloth caftans, waistcoats, and trousers. The lining of the caftans was of the same white colour as the waistcoats. The caftans' buttons (of gilded tombac or brass) indicated the wearer's rank. The occupational identity was also conveyed through the colour and form of lapels, collars and cuffs. Those worn by postal managers were roundly shaped and made from pale yellow cloth (*PSZRI* 1830: 317-18, Vol. 17). Occupational dress provided semiotic narratives that helped to distinguish the professional identities of their wearers.

Social reforms, such as the Petrine Table of Ranks (1722) and Catherine II's sumptuary decrees of 1775, 1782, 1784 and 1790 created a new system of social stratification and incorporation, which, among other distinctions, was manifested through uniforms. Catherine's decrees issued on 9 April, 1784 and on 6 May, 1784 played a particularly significant role in the process of institutionalization, as they introduced uniforms for each region of the empire, for both male and female subjects. The caftans were blue in the northern regions, red in the central regions, and dark cherry-coloured in the southern regions. Further distinctions for each region were oftentimes borrowed from the regional coats of arms (*PSZRI* 1830: 90-93, 148, Vol. 22). The uniforms gave each region a sense of

distinctive identity and made its civil servants instantly recognizable (Figure 2 and 3). The

Figure 2: The Uniform worn in St. Petersburg Governorate

Figure 3: The Uniform worn in Moscow Governorate

From *The Images of Governorate, Provincial, Collegiate and All Civil Uniforms* (1794)
Placed in the public domain by Victor Zaitsev: http://humus.livejournal.com/4559239.html

reforms also led to the strengthening of social ties between subjects and social institutions and regions to which they belonged. In this process, the caftan became a highly semiotized text, which provided information about its wearer's social and regional identities. Eighteenth-century dress reforms made the caftan a primary object of sartorial transformations, a material embodiment of the process of westernization, and as such a subject of cultural and political discussions, and ideological and aesthetic evaluations.

With the development of the domestic textile industry, the caftan acquired a more uniform cut and became more practical, as society made its first step towards 'the Great

Masculine Renunciation' (Flügel 1950). As the caftan acquired a European form and became more directly associated with service, the word also gradually changed in its usage. If in 1733, Vasilii Tatishchev described a *schlafrock* using the word *caftan* and calling it '*spal'noi*' [bedroom] (1997: 93), later in the century, a *schlafrock* was identified as a dressing gown [*khalat*], a garment more suitable for rest. Due to fashion changes, the 'life expectancy' of the caftan became shorter both in Europe and Russia. In the *Letters of a Russian Traveler* (first incomplete publication in 1791-1792), Nikolai Karamzin's protagonist observed the caftan worn by an old Berliner, noting that it was sewn in the first half of the century (1964: 139, Vol. 1). Periodicals and literary works from Sumarokov's *Industrious Bee* (1759) and journals of 1769-1774 to Strakhov's and Krylov's texts criticized frequent changes in the styles and colours of caftans dictated by fashion (Pokrovskii 1903: 18-22).

THE LITERARY LIFE OF THE CAFTAN

The caftan's importance in the life of eighteenth-century men, and its role as a visual symbol of westernizing reforms was reinforced in literary and cultural texts. The garment became the main sartorial image in the discourse on social and cultural changes in Russia, with its allegorical potential being explored primarily, but not exclusively by Catherine II. Reflecting on the complexity and distinctive nature of Russia's collective identity, on one such occasion, the empress claimed that 'the tailor has not yet been born who would know how to cut a caftan to fit Russia's frame' (Turgenev 1886: 61). She conveyed a similar idea at the end of her life through another clothing metaphor, 'There was a time when we were ordered to copy everything from the Danes, then the Dutch, then the Swedes, and then the Germans. But the caftans were too narrow. Designed for small bodies, they did not fit our expanse and were destined to disappear, which is just what happened' (Note for Nikolai P. Rumiantsev in

RGADA, f. 1, op. 1, d. 46, l. 1696; quoted by Kamenskii 1997: 245). The empress compared sewing and fitting of this geographically, stylistically and symbolically versatile garment with identity mapping. Through these images, she offered a critical commentary on her predecessors' attempts to modernize the country, which did not sufficiently take into account Russia's distinctive identity.

Due to the association of the caftan with state-imposed culture and policies, which were implemented with a varying degree of success, the garment started to be employed to discuss judgments and managerial failures. In her journal *All Sorts of Things* (1769-1770), for instance, Catherine II used a caftan metaphor to comment on the inability of the Legislative Commission (1767-1768) to reach any decision on serfdom and other social issues because of the disagreements between the involved parties.[4] The parable described a peasant shivering in the yard, while tailors and their apprentices argued about the cut of the caftan that they were asked to sew for him (1769: 166). In the parable, the cut of the caftan and the fate of the peasant remains undecided, as he continues to freeze without seeing any improvements in his condition.

Caftan metaphors were also employed by Catherine's opponents to criticize her attitudes regarding social issues. Thus, Nikolai Novikov, the editor of the periodical *The Drone* (1769-1770), employed the image of the caftan to challenge Catherine's philanthropic approach to human follies. The garment trope was well suited for his Aesopian discourse with the empress, which provided a critical assessment of Catherine's policy of compromise, 'Many people of frail conscience never mention the name of vice without adding the love of humanity to it. They say that weaknesses are common to men and must be covered by the love of humanity. Thus, they have stitched a caftan for vices out of the love for humanity' (Berkov 1951: 58; Brown: 169, with minor changes). By using this caftan image, Novikov

might have also wished to allude to the empress's failures related to the work of the Legislative Commission, which he witnessed as a member.

Whereas in the texts composed by or critical of Catherine II, tropes associated with the caftan offered an allegorical commentary on official policies, in literary works, the sartorial dichotomy between a service caftan and a modish caftan became important, with the two garments often reflecting opposing worldviews. In these texts, socially privileged subjects usually wore a caftan, and its semantics was influenced by the contexts of social hierarchy and institutionalized service. Kantemir's second satire 'Against Envy and Pride of Ill-Natured Noblemen' (1743, published in 1762) was one of the first literary works that presented a caftan as a semiotic text, able to encode, transmit, and generate meanings within certain social spaces and practices. Here, the writer juxtaposed members of the new service nobility with those of old noble families. Kantemir painted a satirical portrait of his protagonist Evgenii, a member of hereditary nobility, who was unwilling to comply with state regulations and engage in state service. The writer expressed this contrast between duty and his protagonist's vanity and idleness, through the image of Evgenii's modish caftan, which was unsuitable for work. In the text, two social practices – that of learning the language of societal rules and fashion, and that of making a caftan – became linked. Kantemir presented the process of learning about what constituted a proper caftan in fashionable society as an arduous endeavour requiring considerable privations,

> Having squandered your fortune,
>
> You understood that a caftan's skirts should be solid, not thin,
>
> Fourteen inches wide when bent and with a sewn-in cotton cloth lining.
>
> When a caftan is folded, its skirts should be longer than the upper part.
>
> [You also understood] the way sleeves should look, where to insert gussets,

> And the pocket, and how much to add to the chest after its size was measured;
> Which brocades it was proper to use as main fabrics and lining
> For summer, autumn, winter or spring;
> And it is a bit more difficult for Rex to know than for you
> Whether it will be more appropriate to embroider the caftan with silver or gold.
>
> (Kantemir 1956: 72)

The skill of sewing a caftan and the art of understanding fashion were presented as forms of science in this satire. Such analogies, as Yurii Shcheglov has shown, were a part of the classical topoi in the portrayal of fops (2004: 136-140). Kantemir emphasized that meticulous regulations were to be observed in the process of caftan making, describing both the activity and the end product as highly developed art forms. This analogy was strengthened by the implied comparison between tailoring a caftan and writing a neoclassical drama. The fabrics, colours and adornments of the caftan had to satisfy three unities, of season, location and the wearer's age. The emphasis on meticulous regulations that governed the process of tailoring the caftan highlighted the perception of fashion as a form of tyranny.

Kantemir examined foppishness as a socio-economic phenomenon, and engaged with important eighteenth-century themes of consumption, mismanagement of one's property, irrational behaviour and the commodification of human life. In this discourse, a caftan was viewed as an important status symbol of a high society fop rather than as a service uniform. The price that Kantemir's protagonist was prepared to pay for the caftan was measured by the cost of a village. This idea was expressed metaphorically through a reference to Evgenii 'putting on' an entire village [*Деревню вденешь потом на себя ты целу*] (1956: 72). This motif was further developed in Krylov's *Spirits' Mail* (1789), where

each protagonist's modish caftan reminded him of a mortgaged village or 'several house-serfs sold as recruits' (1945-1946: 139, Vol. 1). Disregard for the lives of the serfs, who were treated as objects, were behind such stories of sartorial acquisitions.

While Kantemir included many topoi of classical satirical literature about fops in his poem, he placed them in a culturally specific context. His meticulous description of a model caftan was accompanied by commentaries that contained factual information about fashions and the way the caftans were made at the time. He focused on sartorial language and details relevant to the garment's production, consumption and proper socialization, and satirized the reduction of the protagonist's noble duty to the display of fashionable attributes. As a result, the text critically engaged with the phrase 'the clothes make the man'.

The topos of the inflated significance granted to clothes was exaggerated in the anonymous satire 'An Epistle to a New Caftan,' published in the journal *Evenings* in 1773. The epistle is a translation of Michel-Jean Sedaine's 'Epître à mon habit' (1751), which has been attributed to Maria Sushkova, a sister of Aleksandr Khrapovitskii, Catherine II's Secretary of State (Panchenko 2010). The poem was written in the name of the caftan's owner, who credited his advancement in society to his fashionable garment,

'Ah! My new caftan! I am grateful to you,
I have grown famous thanks to you.
They brought sacrifices to me as to an idol:
The fop, who thinks about his hair, his dress,
About himself and his breed all the time,
Stood before me as if on guard-duty.
And the one who did not lack courage during the Turkish campaign,

Was timid before me [...].

(Pokrovskii 1903: 97)

The modish caftan gave social weight to its owner and compelled him to exploit his influence.

The same topos of constructing an inflated social identity by means of dress was developed in a humorous way in Kniazhnin's play *The Boaster* (written between 1784 and 1785). Here, a tailor who engaged in refashioning the provincial nobleman Verkholet [High Aspiring] into a count questioned the authenticity of his identity, 'Or is he a man of a high rank because I sew for him caftans/ Of the same cut as for all high-ranking men/ And also because he does not pay me?' (Kniazhnin 2003: 117). One of the garments that the protagonist ordered his tailor to make was a velvet caftan of a scarlet colour. A year before Kniazhnin wrote this play, Catherine II introduced uniforms for civil servants of all regions, and decreed that subjects serving in the central regions must wear red caftans. In case of Verkholet, however, this colour did not carry any institutional significance, and was chosen for its association with dominance. The choice of velvet fabric bespoke of his social ambitions and implied that he was not involved in state service, as service uniforms were usually made from woollen cloth. In all three works, the modish caftan with its implications of disengagement from service was at the centre of attention.

Kniazhnin dressed his protagonist in a scarlet caftan, utilizing a colour palette that was often associated with conspicuous consumption and power. One of Catherine II's favourites, Aleksandr Dmitriev-Mamonov, received the nickname of 'red caftan' due to his fondness for this garment. In another literary example, the anonymous 'Fragment of a Journey to …' published in Nikolai Novikov's journal *The Painter* in 1772 and attributed to

Aleksandr Radishchev, the red caftan personified a cruel landowner in the eyes of a frightened young serf (1938-54: 349, Vol. 2). The boy misread a sartorial sign, identifying a traveller in a red caftan with his landowner. Given the importance of dress in shaping and displaying identities in eighteenth-century culture, personifications, which replaced identity with sartorial signs, were frequent in literature.

The popularity of the theme of clothes making men can be explained by a variety of factors. On the one hand, Peter's Table of Ranks (1722), which enabled subjects to receive personal and hereditary nobility through state service helped to increase social mobility. On the other hand, the introduction of a rigid system of rank and occupational stratification, which was manifested partially through dress, led to the establishment of a certain equivalence of social identity and dress. The importance of conspicuous consumption for the upper classes further inflated the significance of clothes as an indicator of status. Satirical attitudes towards fops can be explained by their reluctance to provide useful service to the state, their useless consumption and expenditure, and by society's critical reactions to misapplied Western influences.

Some tensions between the service caftan and the modish caftan are found in Denis Fonvizin's play *The Minor* (written in 1781, published in 1783). The play satirized the effects of Peter's modernizing reforms on the life of retrograde landowners, in particular, the impact of compulsory education for children of the gentry and civil servants aged 10-15, which Peter I introduced in February of 1714 (*PSZRI* 1830: 86, Vol. 5). Fonvizin's minor Mitrofan 'fell victim' to educational and service reforms. He was forced to study in order to prepare for civil service, and through this social practice, was, to a very limited extent, initiated into social institutions of the time. Fonvizin alluded to the initiation of Mitrofan in the opening scene, which discussed the fit of his new caftan.

While the play did not contain any direct references to dress regulations, in the legal discourse the caftan was closely associated with such processes of social incorporation. Moreover, according to Aleksei Strichek, Fonvizin may have borrowed the ritual of donning formal attire from Molière's *The Would-Be Gentleman*, a comedy that concerned itself with questions of education and initiation (1994: 335). Thus, the caftan symbolically represented the potential incorporation of Mitrofan into the world of social and emotional fulfilment through its association with adult life and civil service. The garment was supposed to have a civilizing effect on the minor.

The play began with a discussion of Mitrofan's ill-fitting caftan. His relatives subjected the garment to a variety of interpretations, and in the process were unable to reach an agreement. This dialogue provided an introduction to the arbitrary world of the landowners' family, and the imbalance of power and management failures within the household. On a symbolic level, such an inability to establish a definitive correspondence between the minor's growing body and the garment could be interpreted as indicating the caftan wearer's liminal state.

> *Mrs. Prostakova* [Mrs. Simple] [...] The caftan is all ruined. [...] Mitrofanushka, my dear! I bet it's squeezing you to death [...].
>
> *Mrs. Prostakova* (*to Trishka*). And you, you pig, come closer. Didn't I tell you, you thief's snout, to make the caftan wider? The child, first of all, is growing; secondly, the child's of a delicate build even without a tight caftan.
>
> *Mrs. Prostakova* [...] What're your son's new clothes like for his uncle's engagement? What kind of a little coat did Trishka sew?
>
> *Prostakov* [Mr. Simple] (*timidly stammering*). A li-ittle baggy [...].

Mrs. Prostakova. See what kind of a husband God rewarded me with! Can't think for himself to make out what's wide and what's narrow.

Skotinin [Mr. Pig] [...] The caftan, my friend, is sewn quite well.

(Reeve 1973: 25-26; Wiener 1902: 342-44)

This opening scene contained an implicit reference to the proverb, *'По одежке* [*по кафтану*] *встречают, по уму провожают'* [The clothes/ caftans do not make the man], the meaning of which was realized in the play. This allusion implied that opinions about Mitrofan would be formed on the basis of his inner qualities rather than his appearance; the latter escaped impartial judgments. This classical opposition of appearance and essence found its expression in the remark of Starodum [Mr. Oldsense], who was brought up on the Petrine values of state service. This character acted as a *raisonneur* in Fonvizin's play. Starodum observed about young men seeking promotion at the court, 'I have seen many young chaps in kaftans [sic] of gold brocade, but with leaden heads' (Fonvizin 1959: 134, Vol. 1; Noyes 1961: 51, Vol. 1). The modish caftan is latently juxtaposed here to the service caftan. Likewise, when Mitrofan donned his new garment, he came to be evaluated in terms of duty and honour, associated with the civil service.

The act of tailoring in the play can be perceived as an activity analogous to character formation. Clothes can provide a certain degree of refinement, and in Russian, the word 'education' [*obrazovanie*] has a meaning of giving form. This associative link between educational and tailoring practices may have been inspired by Fonvizin's personal memories about his own unsuccessful educational experiences, in which the caftan played a crucial role on one occasion. In *A Sincere Confession of My Deeds and Intentions* (1798), the writer described his teacher's unconventional sartorial methods of preparing his students for a Latin exam. Each button on the teacher's caftan and camisole corresponded to a certain declension or

conjugation, which students had to memorize in order to understand his promptings (1959: 87, Vol. 2). These memories may have provoked the introduction of the garment in the play.

Subjective interpretations of various types of texts (garments, laws, and opinions) were ardently discussed in *The Minor*. Similarly to the caftan sewn for Mitrofan by the serf Trishka, which was subjected to 'invested' interpretations, facts of common knowledge and laws became distorted by Mrs Prostakova, Mitrofan's mother, to suit her own interests. Starodum admitted that she was skilful in interpreting the laws, '*мастерица толковать законы'*, after hearing Mrs Prostakova's interpretation of the manifesto on noblemen's emancipation from obligatory service granted by Peter III in 1762 as giving her a right to abuse her serfs (1959: 172, Vol. 1). Thus, discussion of the caftan in the opening scene served as a prelude to exposing the practices of domestic mismanagement. It is possible that the polemical use of the caftan imagery in Catherine's and Novikov's journals, with which Fonvizin was familiar, gave the writer an idea for the opening scene in *The Minor*. In the play, Fonvizin critically engaged with the issues of serfdom, managerial failures and misconceptions, to which Catherine's and Novikov's caftan images alluded. In light of these connections, the discussion of the caftan and its size may be also seen as the author's humorous reflection on state policies, their ineffective implementation, and the debated question of Russian identity. The topic of management failures was further developed in Ivan Krylov's 'Trishka's Caftan' (1815), where the writer compared patching and redesigning the caftan with the way members of the gentry attempted to fix their financial problems.

Gavriil Derzhavin further explored the ambivalences related to the caftan in his famous poem 'Felitsa' (1782), written for Catherine II. Here, the poet employed light-hearted satire to engage with the topic of social and sartorial vanity. Rhetorically speaking, he chose the style of the dressing gown rather than that of the ceremonious caftan to talk with

the empress. The poet employed the first person to draw a collective portrait of a lazy courtier at the empress's service, which incorporated the features of several statesmen including Catherine's favourite Prince Grigorii Potemkin (Zapadov 1957: 376). Describing his protagonist's daily routine, Derzhavin mentioned his character's whimsical rush to the tailor to obtain a new caftan, 'Or struck by some fine piece of clothing,/ Hop off to have a caftan made' (Derzhavin 1957: 99; Segel 1967: 272, Vol. 2). The emphasis in these lines shifted from the courtier's vanity to his idleness, fancy and desire for entertainment. Rather than reflecting state service or social status, this caftan was appreciated for its aesthetic value. The modish caftan of the courtier (a statesman and man of fashion) was to be tailored to suit individual needs. Yet, the poem also contained some social commentary, as the courtier's idleness was juxtaposed to the empress's virtues and industrious behaviour.

This light-hearted portrayal of the idle admirer of modish caftans reflected a shift in the attitude to service during the reign of Catherine II. After the abolition of compulsory service in 1762 and with further privileges granted to the noblemen in 1785, they could exercise freedom of choice with regard to service. As a result, disengagement or unenthusiastic engagement in state service started to be perceived less critically in literature. At the same time, the values of service associated with duty and honour became better internalized. In this context, the civil service caftan, sometimes even seen in opposition to that of the state service, received positive connotations. In his memoirs of 1804, Prince Ivan Dolgorukov mentioned such garment of civil service – the blue caftan presented to him by Moscow University as a symbol of his honorary membership. He described the garment with reverence, 'This caftan, which I can truly say was earned by my own merits, will be my best dress throughout my whole life. Neither slander, nor envy will take it off me' (Dolgorukov 2004: 635). Thus, the assessments of caftans and their wearers were influenced by changing

social contexts, the cultural stances of the writers and their attitudes to state power, its policies, and state and civil service.

During the short reign of Paul I (1796-1801), the state impositions on the identities of subjects of the Russian empire increased. Paul's Prussian-inspired military policies included strict dress regulations that meticulously specified the styles, cuts, and manner of buttoning uniforms (*PSZRI*: 1830: 91-92, 95-96, 209, Vol. 24). Officers and soldiers were required to wear uniforms and hair plaits at all times, even if they were off-duty. As Dmitrii Sverbeev, a nineteenth-century historian and memoirist suggests, Krylov's 'buffoon tragedy' *Podshchipa*, composed between 1798 and 1801, but not allowed to be published in Russia until 1871 for censorship reasons, contained critical comments against the ruling government (Vatsuro 1982: 137, 381; Gukovskii [1939] 1999: 339-40). In the play, Krylov included fairly crude allusions to Paul's uniform regulations by making the German invader Trumf impose a ban on wigs, and introduce a new style of wearing caftans inside out (1945-1946: 342, 353, Vol. 2). Thus, the political implications of the caftan as part of a uniform, its association with state-imposed practices, which aimed to shape society through both legislative and tailoring activities, were explored once again. Krylov had the pleasure of playing the role of Trumf when this play was staged at the estate of his exiled superior Prince Golitsyn (Gukovskii [1939] 1999: 339; Vatsuro 1982: 109).

At the turn of the century, new developments in Russian social life and culture further problematized the acquired connotations of the caftan and created a new sartorial dichotomy. In Krylov's unfinished play *The Sluggard*, composed circa 1800-1805, the caftan still symbolized the values of service and active engagement in life, associated with the previous generation. Yet, in this work, the garment was subtly juxtaposed to the dressing gown, nightcap and slippers worn by the young protagonist. According to Mark Al'tshuller,

Krylov became disillusioned with the ideas of Enlightenment, which had been exploited during the French revolution, and became disengaged from social life (1988: 350). The writer cultivated laziness as one of the attributes of his personality, about which he often wrote in letters to his friends. Memoirs of his contemporaries contain references to his lack of interest in state service, as well as to his idleness, negligence, and untidiness (Vatsuro 1982: 44, 66-69, 75-76,80-84, 93, 135, 140, 144, 146, 154, 159, 164). Mikhail Lobanov, one of Krylov's biographers, remembered often seeing the writer sitting on a dirty, worn-out couch dressed in either a shabby dressing gown with holes or in only a shirt (Vatsuro 1982: 67).

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Russian noble society and Romantic literature and art started to glorify idyllic home life, Anacreontic festivities and idleness, as opposed to state duties and the impositions of court life. In Romantic poetry, the idyllic lifestyle became associated with individual freedom and poetic creativity, with poets creating the dressing gown as a sartorial alternative to the uniform of service and as an attribute of spiritual and artistic life. Both in literature and life, socially indifferent private gowns started to replace caftans, which became increasingly associated with state impositions. Krylov's play engaged with this emerging shift in cultural values by juxtaposing Lentul's [Lazybones's] domestic garments and footwear with his caftan. In the play, Krylov embarked on creating a protagonist who was reluctant not only to assume an advantageous service position, or take care of a lawsuit concerning his family estate, but also to involve himself in any form of social life. In fact, Krylov's protagonist hardly ever left his coach and donned his caftan about once a year, '*И раз в году едва бывает он в кафтане*,' gladly exchanging it for his featherbed and dressing gown (1945-1946: 605, 607, 609, 620, Vol. 2). The protagonist's laziness and idleness were juxtaposed to the active lifestyle and engagement in military service during his father's generation. Such a semiotic opposition of lifestyles, which was

sartorially expressed through references to the caftan, on the one hand, and the dressing gown and nightcap, on the other, imbued these garments with the connotations of choice and predilection, engaging with a cultural shift from the values of state service and public life to those of private life and internal freedom.[5]

Krylov described his protagonist as having no interest in rank or fashion, and in light of such a characterization, Lentul's laziness acquired ambivalent connotations.[6] In this context, his nightcap might have had implications of a cap of a God's fool and of a Phrygian liberty cap, which in early nineteenth-century often represented the figure of a poet-philosopher. As Vadim Vatsuro and Anna Sergeeva-Kliatis have shown, Aleksandr Vasil'evskii's portrait of Gavriil Derzhavin (1815), in which the poet wears a dressing gown and a Phrygian-type cap, was interpreted through this sartorial code by the poets of Pushkin's circle (Figure 5) (Vatsuro 1986: 308-311; Sergeeva-Kliatis 2000: 84-85).[7] Krylov's light-hearted tone and treatment of his protagonist Lentul may have been influenced by Derzhavin's good-natured attitude to his courtier in '*Felitsa*'. After all, both authors artistically reworked some details of their own biographies in these works.

Figure 5: Portrait of Gavriil Romanovich Derzhavin (1743 - 1816)
By Aleksandr Alekseevich Vasil'evskii (1794 - after 1849)
Russia, 1815, Oil Painting on Canvas, 67 x 49
Courtesy of the National Pushkin Museum
Received from the Institute of Russian Literature on 15.12.1953
according to the act VMP KP-12825, Zh-236
© The National Pushkin Museum

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As this article has shown, the caftan acquired a rich cultural biography in eighteenth-century Russia, becoming invested with a variety of social and cultural meanings. The Western caftan officially imposed on the urban population by Peter I and promoted by many of his successors acquired ambivalent connotations, due to its associations with the concepts of service, honour, social and cultural integration as well as with the notions of status, control, and social stratification. As a thought-woven garment, the caftan was employed to discuss Russia's distinctive identity, in particular by Catherine II who was critical of radicalism of Petrine reforms and believed that cultural authenticity should be taken into account when new policies and practices were introduced. The caftan's allegorical potential was further explored in discussions of policies implemented by particular sovereigns, social issues such as serfdom, and instances of mismanagement and misconception. These emblematic meanings of the caftan were originally inspired by the legal narrative, which documented dress reforms. Through these texts and state-imposed practices, the caftan started to be perceived as a material embodiment of the processes of westernization and modernization, and symbolized the authority of Russian sovereigns over their subjects.

The frequency of references to the caftan in eighteenth-century literary and cultural discourse can be explained by the fact that it was an essential part of the male wardrobe, and by the changes that it underwent as a part of modernizing reforms. In literary contexts, the garment often reflected the tensions between impositions of the state and individual choice,

service and idleness; these were sartorially encoded through the opposition between the service caftan and the modish caftan. The connotations of these two garments were contextually determined. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the caftan became strongly associated with state control, and the infringement on individual freedom and spiritual life in Russian cultural texts. As a result, in the free-spirited Romantic literature and cultural life of the time, the caftan was replaced by the dressing gown that became a symbol of internal peace, freedom and creativity.

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[1] For different types of caftans in pre-Petrine Russia, see Kirsanova 1989: 107-109. Also, see Svetlana Amelekhina's and Daniel Green's article in this issue.

[2] All translations are the author's, unless otherwise noted.

[3] In what follows, the names Peter, Catherine and Paul without their succession numbers refer to Peter I, Catherine II and Paul I.

[4] For a detailed discussion of these and other garment tropes in Catherine's works, see *All Sorts of Things* 77 (1769): 201; Berkov 1952: 174-175; Lebedeva 2000: 177; Zhivov 2007: 257; Ivleva 2015: 33-35, 38-39, 43.

[5] For associations of a dressing gown and a nightcap with idleness, poetic creativity and freedom in early nineteenth-century Russian literature, see Sergeeva-Kliatis 2000: 76-97; Ermolaeva 2009: 47-56; Bowers 2015: 529-552.

[6] On the ambivalence of Lentul's laziness, see Kiseleva 2001: xxv. Note similar sentiments in

Krylov's epistle to his friend Aleksandr Klushin 'K drugu moemu. A. I. K<lushinu>' [To My Friend. A. I. K<lushin>] (1793).

[7] On the semantics of the cap in early nineteenth-century poetry, see Vatsuro 1986: 308-311.

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